CUSH THE BENJAMINITE AND PSALM MIDRASH

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Among the various types of psalm superscriptions are those which associate a given psalm with a specific episode in the life of David. Throughout the history of exegesis it has generally been taken for granted that the superscription of Psalm 7 contains, among other elements, such a historical allusion to some story directly or tangentially related to David, and the phrase אשר־שר ליהוה על־דברי־כוש בן־ימיני " . . . which he sang to to the Lord according to the words of Cush the Benjaminite" has been understood to relate to the activity of one "Cush the Benjaminite."[1]

In this study an attempt will be made to clarify three questions pertaining to psalm titles in general and to the title of Psalm 7 in particular. First, how is this particular title related to other similar psalm superscriptions? Second, what is the referent of the superscription of Psalm 7? Who is Cush the Benjaminite, and to what episode in the life of David does the title intend to allude? And third, what was the exegetical intention of the tradent who affixed this particular title to Psalm 7?

Psalm Superscriptions and Psalm 7

Those who have considered the superscription of Psalm 7 have often paid too little attention to the syntax of the verse. There are 13 psalm superscriptions which allude to an episode in the life of David, including

1. Both Childs (1971, p. 138) and Dahood (1966, p. 40) have questioned whether this superscription is a historical notation. Both take it as a liturgical rubric relating to how the song is to be sung (. . . [according] to the words of "Cush the Benjaminite"). Though the use of Hebrew על "upon" is used in psalm titles for reasons of issuing a liturgical rubric (e.g., על־אילת השחר "According to the Hind of the Dawn," Ps 22:1), never does it do so following a relative clause such as אשר־שר. The proposal of Dahood and Childs would demand that Cush be the author of the lyrics of the psalm, but such a custom of noting the author is never attested in psalm titles apart from the normal expressions לדוד "of David," לשלמה "of

Psalms 3, 7, 18, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, and 142.[2] As was pointed out by Childs, "the form within the Psalm title by which the historical reference to an incident in David's life is made is stereotyped and constant to a high degree" (1971, p. 139). In every case but two these superscriptions evidence an identical syntactical construction. The historical notations are invariably introduced with ב + infinitive construct. The superscriptions of Psalms 7 and 18, however, do not follow this standard syntactical pattern. Both of these notes begin with the relative אשר followed by a finite verb (אשר־שר "which he sang," אשר דבר "which he spoke"). That only these two of the thirteen notations vary in format suggests that they were not placed in their present positions by the learned scholars who were responsible for the other eleven.

A second observation adds support to the contention that the superscriptions of Psalms 7 and 18 did not derive from the same editorial activity as did those of the other psalms listed above. Unlike the other titles, the superscriptions of Psalms 7 and 18 do not relate unambiguously to any specific event in the life of David as portrayed in the Dtr history. This fact stands in sharp contrast to every one of the other eleven syntactically identical titles. Each of the titles evidencing the syntax ב + infinitive construct alludes very clearly to a specific event in the Deuteronomistic account of the life of David. The following chart demonstrates the care taken by the editor of the psalm superscriptions to locate each psalm clearly and precisely within a particular episode in the Dtr history, principally by the use of catch words taken from the history itself.

Psalm	*Reference in DtrH*	*Key Words and Phrases*
3	2 Sam 15:13–29	flee from Absalom
34	1 Sam 21:13–22:1	feign madness and he departed
51	2 Sam 12:1–4	Nathan and he came to him

Solomon," etc. From the very earliest period, Talmudic and midrashic literature certainly understood the phrase על־דברי כוש "according to the words of Kush" to be a historical rather than a liturgical rubric.

2. This list excludes the superscription of Psalm 30, שיר־חנכת הבית "A song for the dedication of the temple," which certainly refers to the late festival of Hanukkah rather than to the dedication of David's palace or the Solomonic temple.

52	1 Sam 22:9–10	Doeg Ahitub come
54	1 Sam 23:19–20	Ziphites Saul Is David not hiding among us?
56	1 Sam 21:11–16	Gath[3]
57	1 Sam 24:3–8	Saul cave
59	1 Sam 19:11	and Saul sent to David's house to watch him and to kill him
60	2 Sam 8:3–8, 13–14; 10:6–19	Zobah Aram, Syria Joab slay Edom Valley of Salt
63	1 Sam 23:13–26:25[4]	wilderness
142	1 Sam 24:3–8	the cave

The vast majority of these psalm superscriptions contain very explicit allusions to specific texts within the Dtr history. Even in the cases where some ambiguity exists, it results from the fact that several psalm titles seem to have two or more possible referents.[5] Never is a psalm title created that has no clear reference to an episode in the life of David as contained in the Dtr history.

With this fact in mind, then, it is all the more interesting that precisely those two psalms which have notations syntactically at variance with the

3. Although the "seized" of Ps 56:1 is not explicit in 1 Sam 21:11–16, it might be construed from the note that the Philistines "brought" David to Achish (v. 15). In this psalm title we clearly see editorial apologetic at work. David did not really "flee" to Achish (1 Sam 21:11). Rather he was taken captive by this enemy.

4. Some have sought to link this title with a specific wilderness episode, whether in the Wilderness of Paran (König, 1927, pp. 54–55) or the Wilderness of Ziph (Mowinckel, 1961, p. 92). Childs connects this psalm to David's flight from Absalom in 2 Sam 16:14. This proposal seems least likely, since far from being in a "wilderness" setting in 16:14 David and those with him "refresh themselves." It is best to assume that the exegete who added the notation purposefully left it ambiguous so as to refer to the entire wilderness episode in 1 Samuel 23–26.

5. Note in particular the conflation involved in relating the superscription of Psalm 60 to the several war accounts in 2 Samuel 8 and 10.

eleven described above are also alone in the fact that they make no *clear* allusion to the Dtr history. The referent of Psalm 7 will concern us further in the next section. Suffice it for now to say that a "Cush the Benjaminite" makes no appearance in the historical narratives. The title of Psalm 18, which shares a peculiar syntax with that of Psalm 7, also alludes to no specific text in the Dtr history. The Psalm purports to have been sung by David "on the day when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul." For various reasons, the title can refer neither to 2 Sam 7:1 nor to 2 Sam 18:19 nor to 2 Sam 12:7. The first two texts speak of "rest" or "vindication" rather than of "deliverance," and they make no mention of Saul. The last speaks only of Saul and only in a general retrospective fashion.

It would appear that the title of Psalm 18 was not original to the psalm, but was rather added to it at the point when the psalm was included in the Dtr history (2 Samuel 22). The Psalm was placed at this point either by the Dtr historian or by a later redactor as a summary retrospect of David's life. David had fought his last battle, as noted by his "swan song" on the battle field in 2 Sam 21:15–22. David's exploits were over.[6] As of 2 Sam 21:22 he had secured his empire. It is for this reason that the redactor added at this precise point a psalm supposedly spoken on the day when the Lord delivered David once and for all from his enemies, including Saul. The psalm was intended to serve as a fitting conclusion to David's military career. The title was not intended to refer to any specific event in David's life but rather to serve as a comprehensive theological commentary on the entire history of David (Hertzberg, 1964, p. 393).

On the basis of both syntax and function, we conclude that the notations of Psalms 7 and 18 do not appear to have arisen by the same hand or as a part of the same redactional or midrashic activity as did the other eleven superscriptions. Whether the superscriptions of Psalms 7 and 18 were added later than were the other historical notes or whether they resulted from a different school or midrashic intentionality is impossible to determine. Because they are not of the same midrashic stock as the other titles, however, each must be treated on its own, and the rules which might otherwise apply to the eleven standard notations must not be improperly imposed upon either of these two.

6. The battle notes in 2 Sam 23:8–30 do not dispute this fact. They are simple reminiscences of *past* actions serving to introduce David's "mighty men."

Cush the Benjaminite in the Dtr History

It was stated above that there is no reference to a "Cush the Benjaminite" within the Dtr history. There are three different possible explanations for this lack of a clear reference.[7] One possibility is that the notation of Psalm 7, as argued by Dahood and Childs, is not a historical rubric at all. One would therefore not expect to find any such person mentioned in the narratives of the Dtr history. It was argued above, however, that the phrase אשר־שר ליהוה על־דברי־כוש בן־ימיני cannot be a liturgical rubric and must in fact intend a historical reference.

A second possible explanation for the lack of a clear historical reference in Ps 7:1 is the assumption that the notation refers to an episode from some undetermined legendary source, a story which, though popularly told, was not consigned to the Dtr history. This solution to the problem is quick and popular, most recently represented by the commentaries of Kraus (1958, p. 56), Anderson (1972, p. 93), and Craige (1983, p. 99), but formerly proposed by Kittel (1914, p. 24), Gunkel (1926, p. 25), and Weiser (1962, p. 135) among others. There was a Cush, but not in the Dtr history. The major problem with such an assumption is that it begs the question of why such a notice would be given at all. To argue that a psalm title would refer to some unknown legendary event in the life of David recorded in some other source than the Dtr history is quite untenable, given the obvious midrashic intention of such notices. Where the eleven "standard" superscriptions clearly have a specific episode from the Dtr history in mind, it is not at all likely that the superscription of Psalm 7 would not share at least the basic concern to relate, however cryptically, to the same. We should, at all costs, at least begin with the assumption that the allusion is to an episode in the primary historical work of the Old Testament, the Dtr history.

There is a third general category of reasons to explain the cryptic nature of the rubric in Ps 7:1. Many have argued that "Cush the Benjaminite" does appear in the Dtr history, but not by that name. Among scholars who pose this solution are those who argue that Cush was one of the Benjaminite cousins of Saul who allied himself with Saul against David and sought to slander David at every opportunity. He was,

7. Some commentators simply consider the historical notations in psalm superscriptions to be of no historical reliability or significance, and therefore feel no need to deal with them at all. E.g., de Wette, 1856, p. 41.

according to this view, among those of whom David complained to Saul in 1 Sam 24:10.[8]

The most popular solution has centered on taking the name "Cush" as a euphemism for some more well known person in the Dtr history. The two persons who most frequently are mentioned in this regard are Shimei and Saul.

In his listing of psalm historical notations, König (1927, pp. 54–55) associated the title of Psalm 7 with the episode recorded in 2 Sam 16:5–13, depicting Shimei's cursing of David as David fled Jerusalem in the uprising of Absalom. Barnes (1931, p. 30) took Ps 7:4 to be a late gloss which recalled David's two-fold deliverance of Shimei in 2 Sam 16:10–11 and 19:22–24, thereby also linking the psalm to the encounter between David and Shimei. More recently Eaton (1967, p. 42) has argued that "Cush" alludes to Shimei ben Kish, and supports his contention by noting the relationship between 1 Kings 2:44 and Ps 7:17. However, apart from the problematical nature of the play on the interchange between "Cush" (כוש) and "Kish" (קיש), Shimei is nowhere referred to as "the son of Kish." He is a Benjaminite, but is always called "the son of Gera" (בן־גרה). Furthermore, it is doubtful that the exegete who fixed this title to an episode in the life of David would have done so because of a connection of Ps 7:16 to 1 Kgs 2:44, since the latter passage relates to Solomon rather than David. There seems to be no persuasive reason to associate the figure of Cush with that of Shimei.

Perhaps the oldest interpretation of this enigmatic passage is that the figure "Cush the Benjaminite" in Psalm 7 stands for King Saul. The ancient Jewish exegetes took for granted that behind the figure of Cush stood the person of Saul. The Talmud (*Mô*ᶜ*ēd Qāṭān* 16b) offers the explanation that, just as a Cushite is distinguishable by his skin, so Saul was distinguished by his deeds. This argument is driven further by *Midraš Tĕhillîm* which offers two variants of the Talmudic theme. The first (*Midr. Teh.* 7:14) focuses upon the beneficence of Saul's deeds: just as Zipporah was called a Cushite because of her distinguished beauty, so Saul was called a Cushite because of his goodly deeds and beauty. The second (*Midr. Teh.* 7:3) focuses upon the treachery of Saul's distinguishable deeds: just as the Cushite wife of Potipher used lies and slander against Joseph, so Saul used lies and slander against David. Or again,

8. Kirkpatrick (1982, p. 29); Delitzsch (1949, p. 138); Daglish (1962, p. 751); Perowne (1966, p. 42); Kidner (1973, p. 63); Rogerson and McKay (1977, p. 37) take Cush to be a kinsman of Saul and an enemy of David, but relate this title not to the episode of Saul's persecution of David but rather to Absalom's rebellion.

Saul was distinguishable in daring to disobey God, as in his act of illegitimate sacrificing and his sparing of Amalek (*Midr. Teh.* 7:17–18).

It is this theme of Saul's extraordinary and distinguishable disobedience that has been cited by more recent scholars. Hengstenberg (1846, p. 106) follows the traditional Jewish interpretation that Cush represents King Saul, who was filled with dark malice. He takes the reference to Cush (כוש) to be a word play on the name of Saul's father Kish (קיש). The difficulty of such an interchange between כ ק matters little, he argues, since it is a mere allusion. Hirsh (1960, pp. 40–41) has offered a particularly racist interpretation. The term Cush or Cushite, argued Hirsh, designates that "most inferior tribe of the human race;" Benjamin, on the other hand, the noblest. In this psalm David has called Saul the Benjaminite a "Cushite," which is an extremely biting racial slur. David sees Saul's moral iniquities a "deviation tantamount to the genetic deviation that would be represented by the birth of a lowly Cushite from that noble tribe in Israel."

Apart from the obviously extravagant nature of these interpretations, we are still faced with the question of why, given the normal concern identified above of adhering to the literal text of the Dtr history, the exegete of this title would use such an obscure method of relating the psalm to Saul's pursuit of David. Is it likely that a midrashic method, which elsewhere took pains to lead the reader or hearer to a specific text by utilization of specific vocabulary, would use such an obscure phrase as "because of the words of Cush the Benjaminite" in reference to Saul, thereby obfuscating any midrashic intent?

As early as the Septuagint there was an attempt to relate the superscription of Psalm 7 neither to Shimei nor to Saul nor to an undesignated Cushite, but rather to a person named Cushi. The LXX translates the phrase כוש בנ־ימיני as χουσὶ υἱοῦ ιεμενι, "Cushi, the son of Yemeni." If one seeks to locate an individual named Cush in the Dtr history, one might look in vain. However, 2 Sam 18:21–32 relates how a "Cushite" runner brought to David the news of Absalom's death. In this passage the RSV takes הכושי as a gentilic adjective, "the Cushite." Might one argue, however, that our text envisions the runner to be a Hebrew named Cushi rather than a foreign Cushite? Note that 18:21b reads כושי without the definite article, which certainly allows for its use as a proper noun. That the name Cushi is an attested Hebrew name is evidenced both by Jer 36:14, wherein Cushi appears as the great-great grandfather of Jehudi, a prince of Judah, and also by Zeph 1:1, which lists Cushi as the son of Gedaliah.

Commentators generally assume that the reading of χουσὶ in the LXX, Symmachus, Theodotion, Aquila, and Jerome resulted from a bald and patently obvious attempt on the part of the Greek tradition to change the text of Psalm 7 in line with 2 Samuel 18. It can equally be argued, however, that the Greek tradition preserves an ancient interpretation of the psalm superscript, one that may have been intended by the Jewish exegete who added to the psalm the note אשר־שר ליהוה על־דברי־כוש בן־ימיני.

There are problems with such an association. For example, the term בן־ימיני as a designation for Cushi of 2 Samuel 18 is ambiguous, since nowhere in the Dtr narrative is the runner designated a Benjaminite. However, such a problem is no more serious than is that of associating the phrase בן־ימיני with Saul, since its indefinite status, "A Benjaminite," suggests that the person in mind would not otherwise have been known as such, a condition which would hardly fit Saul, but which might fit a relatively little known person by the name of Cushi.

The use of the phrase על־דברי in Ps 7:1 also suggests that the reference is not to Saul but rather to someone whose *words* are giving occasion for David's response. Hengstenberg already established that the phrase על־דברי means not simply "because of" but specifically "because of the *words* of."[9] Such would not fit any situation in which David would be reacting to the actions of Saul. It might, however, fit the situation of 2 Samuel 18, in which David reacts to the *message* which he is brought by the runner. It is precisely the *words* of this Cushi which prompt David to his feelings in 2 Samuel 18–19.

It is suggested here, then, that the Cush of Ps 7:1, as problematic as it is, refers to the Cushi of 2 Samuel 18, who was sent by Joab as a runner to inform David of the death of his son Absalom. This tradition is at least as old as the LXX translation of Ps 7:1, and, though raising some minor problems of its own, avoids some of the major problems involved in associating the figure with Shimei or Saul.

Psalm 7 as Midrash

If, as it is here argued, a major tradition in exegesis has taken the title of Psalm 7 to be a midrash on the text of 2 Samuel 18–19, we must go on to ask what interpretive impact the psalm superscription has. Why would the midrashic exegete or subsequent persons have taken pains to associate

9. Hengstenberg (1846, pp. 103–104). Never is the phrase על־דברי the simple equivalent of the phrase על־דבר. The latter means "because of." The former has a broader range of meanings but always, with the sole exception of Jer 14:1 and 7:22, has reference to specific *words*.

Psalm 7 with the episode of "Cushi" the runner who brought David the news of Absalom's death?

Several recent studies have focused attention upon the function of historical notations in such superscriptions. The function of the psalm superscriptions as midrash is directly linked to the question of their historicality. To what extent are these superscriptions "historical" or at least related to the historical narratives? Tur-Sinai (1950, pp. 262–280) has seen in the psalms, as in all the poetical and rhetorical parts of the Bible, "intercalary poems" which were originally part of the larger historical documents and which could not be understood apart from their original historical context. The psalms originated not as liturgical prayers for general use but rather were borrowed from historical works and later adapted to public worship. According to this theory, the psalm superscriptions must be given the utmost historical consideration. They indicate the *original* intention of the psalmist, since the psalm was composed with a specific historical event in mind.

Such an extreme perspective is counter-balanced by the study of Eissfeldt (1971, pp. 98–101), who regarded the psalm superscriptions as extremely disappointing in their inability to serve at all as *Geschichtsquelle*, historical source material. Like Tur-Sinai, Eissfeldt sought to reduce the function of the superscriptions to the "merely" historical, but with the opposite results. In both cases, however, the psalm superscriptions were regarded (or disregarded) as historical texts and were not considered in terms of their broader function of *interpreting* Israel's historical traditions.

Such an interpretive function was taken up by Childs (1971), who carefully detailed the interpretive process at work in the ascription of certain psalms to specific events in the life of David. As noted above, however, Childs dismissed the title of Psalm 7 from consideration, arguing that it was a liturgical rubric rather than a historical notation, and is therefore not illustrative of such midrashic activity.

More recently, Slomovic has again taken up the question of psalm midrash in the superscriptions, and has included in his study a discussion of Psalm 7. Slomovic suggests (1979, p. 367) that the title refers to the scene in the cave of Ein Gedi in 1 Sam 24:9–23 where David confronts Saul and declares his innocence before God. Slomovic's proposal, as intriguing as it is, hinges upon the use of the verb גמל "requite" in both texts, and still must take "Cush" as a reference to Saul.

In his recent study, Wilson (1985, p. 143) maintains that the midrashic activity of adding historical notations to select psalms "has the effect of obscuring the original cultic matrix of that ps and loosing it to function

on a more personal level." If Tur-Sinai saw in the psalms original historical compositions which were later wrenched out of their historical context to serve as general liturgical compositions, then Wilson has reversed that picture. The intention, he argues, was to make generalized and impersonal corporate psalms more immediately accessible to the needs of individual piety. The problem with Wilson's theory is that it presumes that such notations were added for the sake of the personal piety of the reader and, ultimately, for the sake of understanding the psalm itself.

It is suggested here, however, that quite a different intention is at work in such editorial activity. Far from effecting an interpretation of the psalm involved, such superscriptions were added in order to effect an interpretation of the Dtr history. The notations were not added for the sake of how the psalm was to be read but rather for the sake of how one was to read and interpret the Dtr history itself.

The association of psalms with specific historical narratives is not limited to the Psalter and the Dtr history. Perhaps the best example is that of the psalm which has been inserted into the context of the Jonah narrative in Jon 2:3–10.[10] Another example is that of the addition of the psalm in 1 Chr 16:8–36, which is lacking in the corresponding text in 2 Samuel 6. Both of these texts demonstrate one of the purposes for adding or ascribing psalms to such narrative contexts: the desire to fill out the piety of the person involved (Jonah, David) in contexts where the reader would anticipate more than the meager expression provided by the narrated text. In fact the reader might consider as scandalous the idea that Jonah could be so acquiescent in his predicament or that David would not take this premier opportunity as occasion for a glorious Hymn of Praise.

One function of such midrashic activity, then, seems to have been to place songs, usually of lamentation, into David's mouth at critical points where one would expect extended responses by David but where, in fact, David's response is minimal. The best example is Psalm 51, which is attributed to David upon his being confronted by Nathan following the

10. Considerable debate exists about whether Jonah's psalm was original to its context or added as a secondary feature. Those who argue the former position stress the fact that Jonah is *saved* by the fish and therefore offers a *Tôdāh* or Thanksgiving Psalm. Clearly, however, the context anticipates a *Tĕpillāh* or Complaint Psalm (2:2 ויתפלל יונה "Jonah prayed"). Furthermore, the inappropriateness of the reference to a previous prayer (*Tepillāh*) in v. 8 and the allusion to cultic worship in v. 10, as well as the confusion of the gender of the fish (דג in 2:1 and 11 but דגה in 2:2), attest to the secondary nature of the psalm.

Bathsheba episode. At this point, certainly one of the more moving and critical in the entire Dtr history, David's response is grossly meager. His "speech" is limited to the simple two word confession חטאתי ליהוה "I have sinned against the Lord." One can certainly understand why a later exegete would entertain the notion of placing a fuller confession upon David's lips, lest David appear to be a theological piker. So Psalm 51, the classic penitential psalm, was ascribed to David in this precise setting, thus providing Jewish piety with a more satisfying exemplar of penance in what otherwise would be a case of gross understatement.

This same editorial concern is evident in the association of Psalm 7 with the narrative of 2 Samuel 18. The narrative of David receiving news that his son Absalom was dead is perhaps the single most moving and heart-breaking scene in the entire Dtr history. Although an entire verse is given to David's verbal response, he is still not verbose. The great pathos of 2 Sam 19:1 is set first by the narrative itself: "And the king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept." The height of the pathos is also expressed in David's words, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" As touching as this scene is, it still leaves a lot of David's sentiments unexpressed, especially when in 19:2 we are informed that the King is still weeping and mourning. Certainly one might expect David, the exemplar of psalmic piety, to have spoken a psalm most appropriate for the occasion. As with the case of David's confrontation with Nathan, so here too the expectations and needs of religious piety resulted in the fleshing out of David's cry of lamentation by ascribing to this occasion a psalm which already lay at hand in the Psalter.

If one reason for such midrashic activity was to flesh out the piety of David, a second reason lay in the need to fill in logical gaps in the narrative plot. In the episode of David's confrontation with Nathan, David's two word confession, חטאתי ליהוה, is supposed to lead logically to Nathan's absolution, "The Lord also has put away your sin: you shall not die." One might wonder, as the ancient midrashic exegetes apparently did, whether such a meager confession would logically lead to the radical reversal of the death sentence. To fill in this gap in logical flow, the solution was to expand the narrative. Short of adding to the fixed text of the Dtr history, which was apparently out of the question, the method adopted was to ascribe to David the words of Psalm 51, sung at this precise point in the narrative. Learned readers (or hearers) of the text would know that at 2 Sam 12:13 they should call to mind the words which David sang on this occasion, thereby giving a somewhat more logical basis for the overturning of what was taken to be a sentence of death.

The narrative in 2 Samuel 18–19 also contains a rather glaring logical gap. In chapter 18 there is not one word spoken by David against his faithful (if not somewhat overly zealous) general, Joab. Adding to the treachery of countering David's clear order to spare Absalom, Joab pours ignominy upon the wounds by severely reprimanding the king (19:6–8). David meekly follows Joab's trenchant challenge, "I swear by the Lord, if you do not go, not a man will stay with you this night." The reader of this narrative is taken rather by surprise, then, when in 19:14 David has a radical change of heart and dismisses Joab from his service, appointing in his place Amasa. What accounts for this radical change in moods? Where is the piece which binds the action together? Joab has apparently become David's enemy, but one would never know it by the narrative as presented up to 19:11. The need for a logical connective could be met by adding at this point a psalm which could reveal the inner working of David's mind and show that, in fact, David's dismissal of Joab was the result of a logical progression. Joab had become David's enemy, against whom David would invoke God's wrath and judgment.[11] This was a second purpose served by attributing to David the words of Psalm 7, sung on the occasion of the announcement of his son's death.

The setting of the psalm becomes the period of David's mourning following his reception of the news of Absalom's death. Several connections can be made between Psalm 7 and the text of 2 Samuel 18–19 in the light of this midrashic interpretation.

It is not Asalom but rather Joab who has become the enemy of David, against whom David calls upon the Lord to rise up in anger (Ps 7:7). In fact, Ps 7:5, read in the context of the Dtr narrative, likely intends to distinguish between two persons: the "friend" (שולמי) who is Absalom,[12] and the "enemy" (צוררי) Joab who has become David's adversary (שטן, 2 Sam 19:23). In 2 Samuel 19 all of David's political enemies reconcile with him, with the notable exception of Joab. Shimei, Mephibosheth, the men of Israel and Judah have all come to make their peace with David. Joab is the one who, in at least as precarious a position as the others, further aggravates the situation rather than seeking to heal the rupture.

11. The expression of judgment against Joab is strengthened if one follows Brachter (1972, p. 242) in reading v. 5, "If I spare the man that, for no reason, did me wrong." Not only does David swear on his own innocence but also his oath for vengeance upon Joab.

12. Some take שולמי to mean "the one who requites me (evil)." So Slomovic's translation, "him that did evil unto me" (1979, p. 367). For the problems involved in this verse see Brachter (1972, pp. 241–242) and Leveen (1966, p. 400). The midrashic play on the name of Absalom (אבשלום), however, seems obvious.

Joab's "refusal" to repent may have been one factor leading to the association of this narrative with Ps 7:13, "If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword."

Reading Psalm 7 in the light of the narrative in 2 Samuel 18–19 also reveals several instances of plays on words and images. Just as Joab struck down Absalom with "darts" (שבטים) the adversary of the psalm will be struck down with God's fiery arrows (Ps 7:14). Because Joab threw Absalom's body into a "great pit" (הפחת הגדול, 2 Sam 18:17), this adversary will in turn fall into this very pit (בור, שחת, Ps 7:16) which his hands have hewn.

Cushi's message, delivered in 2 Sam 18:19 and 31, is that David has been "adjudged" (שפט) or delivered from the hands of his enemies. The psalmist applauds the fact that the Lord has "appointed a judgment" (משפט, 7:7). Following David's period of grief, he "arose and took his [judgment?] seat in the gate . . . And all the people came before the king" (2 Sam 19:9). Such a scene could well have called to mind the words of Ps 7:8, "Let the assembly of the peoples be gathered about thee, and over it take thy [judgment] seat on high."

Most significantly, if indeed Psalm 7 was being read as a midrash on the Dtr narrative of 2 Samuel 18–19, it was being read as a declaration of innocence as David distanced himself from the treachery of Joab. It is only appropriate, therefore, that the editor would have placed upon the lips of David a complaint more specifically defined as a Psalm of the Falsely Accused.[13] Ps 7:17, "May his mischief return upon his own head" (ישוב עמלו בראשו), would be read as a declaratory formula spoken by David indicating David's intention of having Joab executed. One's mind is easily jogged to similar situations in 2 Sam 1:16, 3:29, 1 Kgs 2:37, and especially to the eventual death of Joab in 1 Kgs 2:32–33, where David uses similar expressions in order to distance himself from the treachery committed all too closely around him. When the rationale for Joab's murder is given in 1 Kgs 2:32, it would be understood through this midrashic appropriation that Joab was guilty not only of the blood of Abner and Amasa, but also that of Absalom.

In this light, the words of Ps 7:4–5 take on new significance.

יהוה אלהי אם־עשיתי זאת אם־יש־עול בכפי
אם־גמלתי שולמי רע ואחלצה צוררי ריקם

13. Psalm 7 has generally been recognized as a complaint psalm of one falsely accused for use in some manner of temple ritual or legal proceeding. Hubbard (1982, pp. 267–270) has recently discussed the legal and dynamistic aspects of the language of Psalm 7.

> O Lord my God, if I have done this, if there is wrong in my hands,
> if I have requited my friend with evil, or spare the man who, for no reason,
> did me wrong. . . .

Here we have David's clear confession of innocence in the death of his son, Absalom, and, at the same time, a statement of judgment upon Joab for committing such treachery. We have displayed the pathos and the anger of a man who has just lost his own son to the arrogant insubordination of one of his most loyal friends, Joab, who has now become his blood enemy.

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